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The search for self-awareness

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Chapter 4 *Íslenzkt þjóðerni*: Jón Jónsson Aðils' Iceland and the road to the future¹

Sú var tíðin einu sinni (...) að Íslendingar stóðu í fremstu röð í menningarlegu tilliti. (...) Hver veit nema þeir eigi eftir enn þá einu sinni að láta til sín taka í menningarsögu veraldarinnar?
Jón Jónsson Aðils

At the beginning of the 20th century, Iceland had known a quarter of a century of limited self-governance, after more than six centuries of initially Norwegian and consequently Danish dependency. Times were changing fast, and with the realistic prospect of independence, as for instance was about to befall Norway, the future seemed bright. In the wake of nationalist developments in the rest of Europe, the time was right for seeking full self-governance and exhibiting national self-awareness publicly for that purpose, something that on Iceland had not been possible to such an extent before. The authorities rose to the occasion by subsidising historian Jón Jónsson Aðils (1869-1920) to do relevant historic research that they deemed necessary.² In return for this he was to hold lectures about Iceland's history that were open to the public and that were consequently published in book form.³ Like the lectures, as Jón had stated himself, these books were not aimed at a learned and mainly foreign elite, as had been the case with Icelandic historiography in preceding centuries: they were written in the vernacular and intended for all layers of society. And they hit home: the first and most significant of these works, *Íslenzkt þjóðerni* (Icelandic Nationhood, 1903), was to determine the notion of the Icelandic self and to influence public and political discourse – it constituted the breakthrough towards a fully-fledged national identity.

But how did Aðils achieve this? What was so new, so acceptable and attractive and so influential about his account of Iceland's past that it could pave the road to the future? Iceland may have had self-governance, but it still was a Danish dependency, so the glorification of an Icelandic past at the expense of the Danes, in order to claim an independent future, was out of the question. Besides, the general treatment of Icelandic historians by the Danish authorities had always

¹ A shorter version of this chapter has been reviewed and accepted for publication; it is due to appear in the *European Journal of Scandinavian studies* 48-2 (2018).

² Jón Jónsson adopted the last name Aðils in 1917 following a decision by the Icelandic government in 1915 that allowed the adoption of last names in addition to patronymica. In this chapter I will refer to him as Jón Aðils, although he is listed as Jón Jónsson in his writings prior to that date.

³ None of the existing secondary literature mentions the source of this information, which is likely to have been Aðils' biography; Páll Eggert Ólason, 'Jón Jónsson Aðils', *Skírnir* 94-4 (1920), 240 and *Merkir Íslendingar* 2 (1963), 237.

been good, provided they played it cleverly. Therefore, there was little room or need to cause a stir.⁴ A different means for claiming independence had to be found, something that placed Iceland at the centre of the world around it, yet set it apart from the Danish realm and beyond – a unique though recognisable feature that no one could deny and that elevated the nation. This approach had worked for Aðils' predecessors Arngrímur Jónsson (1568-1648) and Finnur Jónsson (1704-89) in earlier centuries: they had succeeded in profiling Iceland by highlighting its ancient language, its scientific prowess and its independent native character, whilst using contemporary ideas to provide a recognisable image of the country.⁵ A similar approach was bound to be successful. Aðils used ideas provided by the Danish theologian and nationalist N.S.F. Grundtvig and chose anchors to profile Iceland's past and future that he could use safely: culture and individuality within a national context.

This chapter aims to investigate how Aðils balanced over the fissure between the past and the future in writing *Íslenzkt þjóðerni*, and how he used said ideas to construct a bridge between the two. The tools he used to this aim were both old and new, connecting to signs of self-awareness and methods supplied by the Icelandic historiographical tradition, but using more modern ideas and a modern setting for creating and presenting his own take on Iceland's past. I will argue that he moved away from a national self-image that took shape between 1600 and 1800 and that was constitutional, semi-cultural and focused on continuity from the past up to the present day, to one that was cultural-political and focused on continuity between the past and the future. Moreover, I aim to show that in order to support the depiction of an imaginary golden age, Aðils compensated for the lack of a truly glorious historical past, and of reason to rebel against Denmark, by using and twinning the nation-defining notions of culture in the widest possible sense – both indicating an ideal and a reality – and of an innate love of freedom and independence. It is my opinion that his interpretation of this golden age was the culmination of a trend that started on Iceland in the 1770s and that took ground in the mid-1800s. My aim is to show that Aðils developed and used a state of culture as an identity-building concept in his description of Iceland's past, and that this historical state of culture as the basis for the country's future is the key element of the national self-awareness professed in his work. Furthermore, I will propose that Aðils put the notion of the Icelanders' love of freedom to use for that same purpose in connecting the past with the future, with a view to claiming independence. Both elements, culture and love of freedom, served the depiction of the past and the goals for the future so well that they would produce a lasting national sense of superiority, a self-image that previously had

⁴ Guðmundur Hálfðanarson, 'Iceland: a peaceful secession', *Scandinavian Journal of History* 25 (2000), 97.

⁵ See Chapters 2 and 3; also Kim P. Middel, 'Arngrímur Jónsson and the mapping of Iceland', in Lotte Jensen (ed.), *The roots of nationalism. National identity formation in Early Modern Europe, 1600-1815*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016, 109-133.

been apologetic. Finally, I hope to shed light on the impact that *Íslenzkt þjóðerni* had on the future of Iceland, and to show how the concepts of culture and freedom designed by Aðils have defined national identity, in order to contribute to a more comprehensive appreciation of Aðils' influence on modern-day Icelandic self-awareness.

SETTING OUT: CONSTRUCTING THE NATION

In 1874, at the country's millennial celebrations of its settlement in 874 AD, Iceland was granted legislative power by the Danish king. It was not as if this happened overnight. In the wake of Denmark's establishing regional councils in the 1830s, Icelandic dignitaries had pushed for an assembly of its own, which ultimately led to a royal decree in 1843 arranging for elections and the subsequent installment of such an assembly. It was named Alþingi, after its mediaeval counterpart, and the first assembly was held in 1845. This event was a boost for the Icelandic independence movement under the guidance of Jón Sigurðsson, which then developed to such a degree that in the subsequent thirty years it could fight for and succeed in acquiring legislative power, in the year that marked Iceland's millennium. But that was not the end of the battle: the next step would be self-governance, because Icelandic affairs were still decided in Denmark, in the Danish Council of State. What Iceland needed to legitimise its aspirations with was an ideological basis that would shape the nation in undeniable ways, based on a communal history. So, by end of the century, the Icelandic government was actively pursuing cultural bonding: it was contracting writers and artists to mould highlights and heroes of the past, and the nation with it, in writing, painting and sculpture, in order to build towards a future of independence.⁶ It should serve the entire population, and the government was willing to pay for it.

Jón Jónsson Aðils would become the key figure in this process, and he came at the right moment. By 1899, the government had had poor experiences with grants paid to individuals that had not resulted in the desired historical writings, and decided to cancel them. The subject of their complaints was Bogi Th. Melsteð, who had received money for years, but had not produced a single sheet of paper. Having studied history in Denmark, Aðils was an up and coming historiographer who had recently joined the ranks of those who obtained governmental grants, and had made a much better impression in comparison with his colleague.⁷ The

⁶ The most notable artist contracted for such purposes besides Aðils was the sculptor Einar Jónsson; see Júlíana Gottskálksdóttir, 'Monuments to settlers of the North: a means to strengthen national identity', in Sumarliði Ísleifsson and Daniel Chartier (eds.), *Iceland and Images of the North*, Sainte-Foy: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2011, 205-228.

⁷ From the minutes of Alþingi meetings in 1899, as printed in *A-deild Alþingistíðinda 1899, Fjárlög 1900-1901*, 568: '...þar sem Bogi Melsteð hefur sýnt, að hann er alls ekki hæfur til þessara sagnfræðisstarfa, þá er það þver á móti með þennan mann (i.e. Aðils)'; *ibid.* 627:

cancellation of grants had also affected him, and in a letter to the government in 1899 he expressed the wish that government reverse its decision and award him an annual grant that would support him completely, so that he could pursue his life's work: writing Iceland's history. It was a clever move, because it was clear that the government would be interested in subsidising someone who would actually get the job done. They had, however, grown wise with their past experiences and after discussing the matter repeatedly between 1899 and 1901, they said that they would agree on one condition: in exchange for an annual stipend Aðils was to hold public lectures about Iceland's history. Moreover, they decided that if he were to give these lectures, they would save on their expenses by granting him half the sum he desired, as he would no longer be able or need money to travel to Denmark for his research anymore.⁸

Aðils agreed to the proposition, and stated that he considered such lectures the best method for getting people interested in and excited over national history.⁹ His educational background in Danish *folkehøjskoler* or popular education centres and the work of the Danish romantic nationalist N.F.S. Grundtvig and his adept Ernst Trier, who had been Aðils' teacher at the popular school of Vallekilde, had brought him to the conviction that popular education was more than part of a civilising offensive. In Grundtvigian form, with its focus on raising national awareness, it was the method to further unity within the nation – and the national cause.¹⁰ It should be open to everyone; teaching was to be performed orally, in public lectures, with a specific focus on the nation, its history and the ideas and written legacy of its forefathers. And since the main characteristic of a nation was its language, which needed to be preserved, these lectures were to be conveyed in the mother tongue.¹¹ The setting was right, for Iceland actually had a popular

'Þá hefir (...) komið með tillögu um að veita Jóni sagnfræðing Jónssýni 600 kr. á ári.' See also Ólason, *Skírnir* 94-4 (1920), 239.

⁸ No copy of the exact agreement could be traced in the Icelandic National Archive (*Þjóðskjalasafnið*), the National and University library (*Lbs-Hbs*) or in the archives of the Icelandic parliament (*skjalasafn Alþingis*); the correspondence from Aðils with Alþingi and minutes of Alþingi meetings provide information about its realisation and the details between 1899 and 1901. See the minutes of Alþingi meetings in 1899, as printed in *Fjárlög 1900-1901*, 507: '...styrkurinn til sagnfræðings Jóns Jónssonar komi í stað styrksins til Boga Melsteð. Það eina, sem ég hefi við þetta að athuga, er það, að fjárlaganefndin hefir bundið því skilyrði, að hann haldi alþýðlega fyrirlestra um efni úr Íslandssögu...'

⁹ See the image on p. 165. Letter from Aðils to Alþingi dated July 7th 1899, preserved at the Archives of the Icelandic Parliament: 'Að því er opinbera fyrirlestra snertir, alit ég þá heppilegasta veginn til að vekja og glæða hjá mönnum smekk fyrir og áhuga á sögu fósturjarðarinnar.'

¹⁰ Ingi Sigurðsson, 'Áhrif fjölþjóðlegra hugmyndastefna á alþýðu', in Loftur Guttormsson and Ingi Sigurðsson (eds.), *Alþýðuminning á Íslandi 1830-1930*, Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2003, 230; Flemming Lundgreen-Nielsen, 'Danskhed i krige og kriser. 1800-1864', in Flemming Lundgreen-Nielsen (ed.), *På sporet af dansk identitet*, Copenhagen: Spectrum, 1992, 130-136.

¹¹ Jón Jónsson Aðils, 'Alþýðuháskólar', *Eimreiðin* 8-1 (1902), 21: '... hugmyndir Grúndtvígs um yfirgripsmikla og víðtæka alþýðufræðslu á móðurmálinu. (...) Bækur og bókagrúsk

tradition of the oral rendition of history in the vernacular, in the home. Also, literacy among the population was high in all layers of society and there was a keen interest among the general public in disseminating written information and sources. This was supported by the increasing availability of printed secular writings and the formation of reading clubs in the second half of 19th century.¹² And finally, there was a demand for the publication and dissemination of popular educational writings from the 1870s onwards.¹³ Therefore, the government's condition for awarding the grant coincided with Aðils' own beliefs and would fall on fertile ground, both written and orally. He indicated in his letter that he had ample experience delivering lectures, be it mostly in Danish, and implied that he was qualified to take on the task.¹⁴ The deal was closed and Aðils started his public lectures on Icelandic history, especially to Icelandic students and the Icelandic youth movement in which he was actively involved: young people formed the main target group in which national sentiments were to be instilled.¹⁵ His lectures would subsequently be published in three works: *Íslenzkt þjóðerni* (Icelandic Nationhood, 1903), *Gullöld Íslendinga* (The Golden Age of the Icelanders, 1906) and *Dagrenning* (Dawning, 1910).

Íslenzkt þjóðerni (hereafter referred to as *Íþ*) was the most comprehensive of the three, a history of Iceland from its settlement to Aðils' day with a specific focus on nationhood and nationalism. It disclosed an ulterior motive, one where the government's wishes met Aðils' ideas, which he immediately brought forward in the introduction.¹⁶ In the spirit of Grundtvig's ideas, common awareness of a nation's history would pave the way to its future. Following the Herderian concept of *Volksgeist*, Grundtvig had minted the concept of a comprehensive Nordic spirit, *Nordens ånd*, that had always been to fight constantly for perfection of what is good and right, and therefore for a better future.¹⁷ Aðils had expressed his admiration for Grundtvig and his ideas in 1902 in an article about popular

skyldi útilokað sem mest mætti verða við kensluna (*sic*), og í þess stað ætti að koma hið lifandi orð á vörnum...

¹² Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and Davíð Ólafsson, "Barefoot historians": education in Iceland in the Modern Period', in Klaus-Joachim Lorenzen-Schmidt and Bjørn Poulsen (eds.), *Writing peasants. Studies on peasant literacy in Early Modern Northern Europe* 2002, Kerteminde: Landbohøistorsk Selskab, 2002, 182-183 and 194.

¹³ Ingi Sigurðsson, 'Útbreiðsla og viðtökur alþýðlegra fræðslurita', in Loftur Guttormsson and Ingi Sigurðsson (eds.), *Alþýðumenning á Íslandi 1830-1930. Ritað mál, menntun og félagshreyfingar*, Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2003, 145.

¹⁴ Letter mentioned in note 9: '...ég hef eigi nema alls einu sinni flutt fyrirlestur á Íslenzku. Aftur á móti hef ég haldið marga alþýðlega fyrirlestra við alþýðuháskóla í Danmörku.'

¹⁵ Aðils, 'Alþýðuháskólar', 24: '...að vekja æskulýðinn til meðvitundar um og skilnings á sínum háleita guðdómlega uppruna og sínu háleita guðdómlega takmarki (...) og glæða þjóðernistilfinninguna.' See also Sigurðsson 2003: 236.

¹⁶ *Íþ* 1: 'Það er efni þessara fyrirlestra, að rekja í stuttu máli helztu þættina í lífi og sögu Íslendinga (...) en þó sérstaklega að taka fyrir þá hliðina, sem snertir þjóðernið sjálft og þjóðernistilfinninguna.'

¹⁷ Grundtvig phrased this notion in *Nordens Aand* in 1834; see N.F.S. Grundtvig, *Udvalgte skrifter* vol. 8, Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1909, 45: 'Ærlig Kæmp var Aandens Glæde...'

education; this particular idea, in Aðils' words, was the single most significant feature of Nordic nations according to Grundtvig, and on this Grundtvig's ideas about the future were founded.¹⁸ It was not difficult for Aðils to let this shared Nordic characteristic coincide with the commonly accepted notion that in the 9th century AD the Icelanders had fled the Norwegian king to found a better political future on Iceland – one of freedom – which had been the beginning of the Icelandic nation. In other words, if the Icelanders lived by their nation's original disposition, the outcome had to be freedom: honouring the past that had resulted from that disposition would ensure such an outcome. This was what the government wanted, and Aðils could provide an ideological foundation for it. At the same time, the implicit political undertone of his statement indicated that the political situation of dependency set boundaries to what he could write. He had to decide on how he could draw within these lines to create a fundament so steady and acceptable that it would be the basis for his country's future.

Writing from a position of dependency, constructing the nation seemed easier said than done, but applying nationalist standards set by Grundtvig – not by Fichte and Herder directly¹⁹ – to the idea of an Icelandic nation would solve this problem. Grundtvig, who had shaped and secured the concept of the Danish nation, had set mediaeval Iceland as an example of what an ideal society, both in learning, government and language, should look like.²⁰ Aðils was a professed admirer of Grundtvigian thought, so what could be easier than to translate and elaborate these ideas for an Icelandic audience? For starters, Grundtvig had introduced Herderian thought about a nation's identity being visible in its language and writings into Denmark. It provided Aðils with the perfect ideological filling for the Icelandic nation's framework.²¹ Why perfect? Because the concept had been tried, tested and accepted. Iceland's main claim to fame from the seventeenth century onward – the purity of the Icelandic language and Iceland's mediaeval literary legacy – served very well to fulfil the requirement of language as a nation's binding factor, with its literature, both old and modern, as written proof. The theme of language and literature as identity-defining factors had been worked out by the aforementioned Icelandic historians Arngrímur Jónsson and Finnur Jónsson earlier on: Icelandic mediaeval literature, preserved in the heritage of manuscripts, was presented as proof of the unspoiled Icelandic language being a modern classic and

¹⁸ Aðils, 'Alþýðuháskolar', 20: 'Í þessari skoðun þykist Grúndtvíg hafa fundið hið insta og upprunalegasta eðliseinkenni hinna fornnorrænu þjóða, og á þessum skoðunargrundvelli byggir hann sína bjargföstu trú á framtíð þeirra í veraldarsögunni.'

¹⁹ It has been assumed that Aðils' ideas were derived largely from Fichte and Herder, with the added clause that this may have been through the work of Grundtvig, with no further investigation; see Sigríður Matthíasdóttir, *Hinn sanni Íslendingur, Þjóðerni, kyngervi og vald á Íslandi 1900–1930*. Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2004, 46.

²⁰ N.F.S. Grundtvig, *Udvalgte Skrifter* vol. 7, Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1908, 144: 'Derimod kan det være os til stor Oplysning, altsaa baade til borgerlig og videnskabelig Nytte, at betragte Islænder-Livet som den kæmpemæssige Overilelse, det var.'

²¹ Flemming Lundgreen-Nielsen, 'Grundtvig and romanticism', in J. Stewart (ed.), *Kierkegaard and his Contemporaries*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003, 222.

of mediaeval Icelanders being scholars and scientists in all disciplines. They had done this so craftily in their Latin writings that it had soon found resonance with a learned, foreign audience within Denmark and the rest of the North, and beyond.²² These internationally canonised highlights of Icelandic history seamlessly fit into the idea of an Icelandic nation. Judging by his writings, it would seem likely that Aðils, who commanded Latin, used both men's works as source material. All he had to do was to present their ideas to his fellow countrymen in Icelandic, who were largely oblivious to what through Latin texts had become common knowledge abroad centuries before. But he also needed to present them with a new historical context, the fulfilment of another requirement: a glorious past which the nation had supposedly once known.

The concept of a golden age itself did not pose much of a problem. The term *gullöld* indicating an imaginary golden era on Iceland had been in use for more than half a century. It was first used in this sense in 1846, following the re-instatement of Alþingi by the Danish king, when it was referred to as 'our golden age', which had been one of freedom. Already it was stated that the Icelanders had to follow in their forefathers' footsteps and read about their country's history to look to the future and find their ardour and freedom – and already it was made clear that this was possible only because the king's benign decree, intended to fortify the Icelanders' sense of community, allowed for it.²³ In the following decades, *gullöld* would come to be defined as an era coinciding with Iceland's mediaeval *allsherjarríki* or commonwealth, a term coined in the second half of the 19th century to refer to Iceland's social-political structure from the establishment of Alþingi in 930 until 1262-64, when the country became a Norwegian – and later Danish – dependency.²⁴ This golden age was characterised by purity of language, free trade, and the warrant of proper legislation and freedom under said government.²⁵ The term had also been used by the aforementioned leader of the

²² See Chapters 2 and 3.

²³ 'Fáein orð um félagskap og samtök presta', *Ársrit samið og gefið út af prestum og aðstoðarprestum í Syðra-Þórsnesþingi*, Reykjavík: H. Helgason, 1846, 3: 'Miðaldirnar hafa stungið okkur Íslendingum svefnþorn (...) þó hefðum við altaf getað heyrt hinn fagra frelsis-óm sögu vorrar (...) aldrei svo dymmt, að ekki hafi endrum og eins brugðið fyrir bjarma uppaf gullöld vorri...'

²⁴ Konrad von Maurer and Jón Sigurðsson, *Upphaf allsherjarríkis á Íslandi og stjórnarskipunar þess*, Reykjavík: Prentsmiðju Ísafoldar, 1882. The term *allsherjarríki* is found as early as 1860 to refer to other nations; *Ný félagsrit* 20 (1860), 133: '...eitt allsherjarríki yfir allar þýzkar þjóðir...'

²⁵ *Tíðindi frá þjóðfundi Íslendinga árið 1851*, Reykjavík: Prentsmiðja landsins, 1851, 285: '...hina gömlu og góða gullöld Íslendinga, þegar þeir höfðu sjálfir skip í förum'; Jón Þorkelsson, 'Vatnsdæla saga', *Þjóðólfur* 11-3/4 (1858), 11: 'Ég þekki enga góða og vandaða prentaða fornþók nè (*sic*) neina skinþók ritaða á gullöld vorri, þar sem ritað er *hefir* fyrir *hefir*...'; Guðbrandur Vigfússon, 'Íslenzkar réttitunarreglur eptir Halldór Friðriksson', *Þjóðólfur* 12-18/19 (1860), 70: '...að laga ritmálið sem bezt og mest eptir því, sem ritað var á gullöld málsins'; *ibid.* 12-24/25 (1860), 86: '...gullöld sagna vorra var á 13. öld miðla og ofanvarða'; *ibid.* 13 (1861) 153: 'Nú er liðin gullöld góð gömlu Íslendinga (*sic*), þá í fullu

independence movement, Jón Sigurðsson, to designate a time of self-governance in the future, but not without mentioning the fact that some might – unjustly – consider the era under Danish government a *gullöld* politically as well.²⁶ Whenever the term was used, there was always an awareness of and deference to the current political situation, and even to the critical notion that a golden age is never as golden as people think and that it is a condition only recognised as such in hindsight.²⁷ The result was a *gullöld* that was intrinsically linked to the past, to the future and to freedom, and whose relative merits were accepted. Half a century since its introduction, the concept needed a more tangible content to fulfil the requirement for constituting a nation. This could be dealt with by profiling it more substantially, but how?

The obvious way of doing it would have been by describing a past of great political and military achievement such as the ones other nations used to profile themselves with. The real problem was that Iceland did not have a truly glorious past of that kind. Where Germany and the Netherlands could claim a past of political greatness, with former governments and rulers that could and did achieve imperial dominion and/or colonial aspirations, Iceland could not. When it was still independent, it had not expanded its power abroad, nor had it fought or won any wars; Aðils himself claimed they had, but those wars had taken place elsewhere in the North and they could not claim them as their own.²⁸ Under the *allsherjarríki*, things had been peaceful. A so-called aristocracy of chieftains maintained a balance of rule, and any contacts with the kings of Norway until appr. 1220 were kept on such a basis that it did not shock the system at home.²⁹ With Iceland's dependency to Norway, and later Denmark, from 1262-1264 until the mid-nineteenth century, any possibility for political endeavours was gone. In other words, on the scene of occidental history, Iceland had not played a role of significance. This lack of a glorious past posed a huge gap in the construction of the Icelandic nation that Aðils somehow had to fill up.

The means that would help him solve his problem was the introduction of *folkeånd*, the national spirit. After having defined the comprehensive *Nordens ånd*,

fjóri stóð, frelsi og löggiöf þinga'; *Baldur* 1 (1868) 47: '...að bændurnir sjálfir sendi þau til annarra landa með vörur sínar (...) enda gjörðu svo forfeður vorir á gullöld landsins.'

²⁶ Jón Sigurðsson, *Ný félagsrit* 20 (1860), 6: 'Menn skyldi hugsa, eptir því sem sumir vera hræddir og kvíðbogafullir þegar talað er um sjálfsforræði Íslendinga, að þessar tíðir hefði verið gullöld Íslands, en það fer fjarri.'

²⁷ Benedikt Gröndal, *Gefn* 4 (1873), 4: 'Þenna fagra tíma, þegar engann skugga átti að hafa dregið á fegurðarinnar sól, kalla menn "gullöld", en slíkur tími hefur aldrei verið til eins óblandinn og menn ímynda sér (*sic*) hann.'

²⁸ According to him Icelanders had taken part in wars fought in the North, earning themselves a reputation of bravery, endurance and fair play, but these were not their own wars; *Íþ*, 238-239: 'Þeir taka þátt í viðskipta- of hernaðarlífi Norðurálfaþjóðanna og geta sér hvervetna góðan orðstýr fyrir djörfung og hugprýði, hreysti og drenglyndi.'

²⁹ The sons of Icelandic chieftains were generally sent to Norway to become the king's courtiers, only to resume their autonomous position as chieftain once they returned to Iceland; see Gunnar Karlsson, *Iceland's 1100 years*, London: Hurst & Co, 2000, 82.

Grundtvig in the footsteps of Herder had worked out *Volksgeist* specifically for Denmark, in that the Danish nation was defined by its own national spirit. To Grundtvig, the Danish national spirit sprang both from the old Norse pagan religion and Christendom, which he considered manifestations of the same spiritual power.³⁰ Maintaining the national spirit by honouring one's birth, blood, and love of the mother tongue and of the fatherland's ardour would lead to *folkeligheden*, a sense of communal belonging that in my opinion is best described as nationhood.³¹ Consequently, in his poem of that name from 1848, Grundtvig linked the national spirit to a golden age of the past, that would shine again, now and in the near future.³² This type of golden age was not typified by former imperial and military prowess – it did not have to be, because Grundtvig said that the Danes took no interest in such matters and were much more about attending to each other.³³ This statement suited his situation: he found himself both in what the Danes considered a new golden era culturally and in what he himself considered an ideal situation politically: an 'opinion-guided monarchy'.³⁴ On a practical note, it was the beginning of the First Schleswig War (1848-50); with the outcome undecided it may not have been the right time to claim a past of military success. Grundtvig's eyes therefore were focused on the next step that he was actively pursuing: encouraging the organisation of society, which in its turn would lead to the full development of all innate talents present.

Aðils was quick to pick up on this line of thought. Defining the Icelandic national spirit or *þjóðarandi* as stemming from Nordic and Celtic branches of the same Aryan tribe, with the same combined pagan-christian background, he painted a picture of a uniquely dual national make-up that featured the Nordic perseverance, with its innate struggle for the good, and Celtic cultural prowess.³⁵ This was the make-up of a nation consisting of men who were both creative and

³⁰ Anders Pontoppidan Thyssen, 'Grundtvig's ideas on the church and the people up to 1824' in E. Thodberg and Pontoppidan Thyssen (eds.), *N.F.S. Grundtvig. Tradition and renewal*, Copenhagen: Det Danske Selskab, 1983, 100, 107.

³¹ *folkeligheden* has also been translated as 'the spirit of the people', 'peoplehood', 'popular feeling', 'the people's character' and 'Danishness'; to my mind 'nationhood' comes closest because of Grundtvig's nationalist ideas and ideals.

³² N.F.S. Grundtvig, *Udvalgte skrifter*, vol. 9. Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1909, 141 (first published in *Danskeren, et ugeblad* 1 (1848), 383: '...den fælles Folkeaand (...). Har do Folket havt til Vætte meer af Aand end Veir og Vind, trøster det sig tør forjætte Liv igien, som aandes ind: Gylden-Aaret, som det falder, Efterglands af sin Guldalder...' See also Flemming Lundgreen-Nielsen, 'Grundtvig i guldenalderens København', *Grundtvig Studier* 46 (1995), 126 and 129.

³³ Lundgreen-Nielsen, 'Grundtvig i guldenalderens København', 128.

³⁴ Tine Damsholt, "'Hand of king and voice of people": Grundtvig on democracy and the responsibility of the self', in John A. Hall, Ove Korsgaard, and Ove K. Pedersen (eds.), *Building the nation. N.F.S. Grundtvig and Danish national identity*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015, 160.

³⁵ Íþ 48-49. For further information on how Aðils worked out the pagan-christian aspect, see Simon Halink, *Asgard revisited. Old Norse mythology and Icelandic national culture, 1820-1918*, Zoetermeer: NBD Biblion, 2017, 1-18.

resolute, and who, as Icelandic historiographers in earlier centuries had already written before him, were nearly all of outstanding descent. The result of this *þjóðarandi* was a national awareness, a claim to nationhood equal to Grundtvig's *folkeligheden* that Aðils called *þjóðerni* – hence the title of the work. Thus defining the Icelandic national spirit, he provided himself with two main themes – culture and the love of freedom – that he could render plausible by introducing the mediaeval literary legacy and state-structure ‘as their external features’.³⁶ Both themes would help him give further content to the golden age that was so badly needed and construct a national identity that would yield wide acceptance to a national audience. What is more, they helped him complete his definition of the Icelandic nation in such a way that it might justify claims to independence internationally.

STEP ONE: CULTURE

Now armed with the tools he needed, Aðils was confident to start claiming a *gullöld* for Iceland. He opened the first chapter of *Íþ* by saying that it coincided with what he referred to as the era of the saga's, the *söguöld*.³⁷ Again he made use of ideas provided by Grundtvig, that all nations go through three periods – youth, adulthood and old age – before they can be born again: he set those periods for Iceland in 930-1262, 1262-1550 and 1150-1750.³⁸ Grundtvig had said that the first of these is always the best; therefore *gullöld* simply had to be the first period in Icelandic history, and it was easy to identify it with the period of the *allsherjarriki* that had already been marked out. The result of Iceland's *þjóðarandi* during this time had been a society to which there was hardly any equal, implying that its two main characteristics were equally unparalleled.³⁹

Culture was the first of the two traits that Aðils worked out, although the two are closely linked in his narrative. Now what exactly the concept of culture, *menning*, entailed was not immediately clear; it would fluctuate throughout the work. He introduced *menning* in chapter one as a known feature of the Vikings, but also as one that they had sought to improve by visiting the Celts, who were by far the most prominent nation culturally. There were accounts of Viking-Celtic

³⁶ *Íþ* 1, 64: ‘...tvær hliðar þjóðlífsins á Íslandi, sem öðru framar hafa gert það víðfrægt um allan heim, forníslenzkar bókmentir og forníslenzk stjórnarskipun, svari hvor fyrir sig eðliseinkenna þeirra tveggja kynþátta, – Kelta og Norðmanna –, sem íslenzkt þjóðerni er runnið af.’

³⁷ *Íþ* 4: ‘...söguöld er gullöld vor Íslendinga.’

³⁸ Aðils 1902, 18: ‘...þrjú aldursskeið mannsins (...) alveg eins er því háttað með líf hvernar þjóðar fyrir sig, og í enn víðtækari skilningi með líf mannkynsins í heild sinni’; *Íþ* 238-248.

³⁹ *Íþ* 49: ‘Hér rann saman í eitt andlegt sjör, hugvit og snild Keltanna, og djúpskygni, staðfesta og viljaprek Norðmannanna, og fæddi af sér þjóðlíf, sem varla hefur átt sín líka í sögunni’; *Íþ* 238: ‘Á þeim öldum stendur hagur þjóðarinnar með mestum blóma (...) að hvergi hefur átt sinn líka á fyrri öldum...’

contacts in the saga's, so he had written sources to back up his assertions.⁴⁰ He introduced the Celts as people of the mind, who were sensitive, creative and impulsive (yet backward in other aspects!); they had schools when others did not and attached great importance to scholarship and fine arts, causing their society to thrive and be characterised by these features.⁴¹ That is what Aðils claimed the Vikings were after in order to supplement their own introverted, practical mentality of perseverance.⁴² Irish monks and clergymen had saved the writings from ancient Greece, 'the gem of world literature', from oblivion in order to improve their mind and knowledge, and as a consequence provided future generations of civilised cultures with a basic education.⁴³ The addition of the Celtic cultural mind-set to that of the Vikings was therefore bound to result in a culture that was at least equal to that of the ancient Greeks, with a similar literary legacy. It would take some time for the blending of the two to come to fruition, which is one of the reasons why Aðils left out the era of the settlement of Iceland (871-2-930) until the founding of Alþingi in 930 in his definition of the *gullöld*: Alþingi, he wrote, was the cradle of Iceland's national culture or society.⁴⁴ It was also the reason why he did include the *Sturlungaöld*, the period from 1220 till 1262-1264 when the *allsherjarríki* had started to falter, in the *gullöld*: it had not been a golden age politically, but it had been culturally, given the nation's literary highlights such as *Heimskringla* that were produced at that time.⁴⁵

Aðils' introduction of *menning* sketched a tripartite image of culture as the need for, a state of and the fruits of a high degree of mental and intellectual development. The ideological results were variously referred to by Aðils as *þjóðmenning* (the nation's culture, society), *menningarþjóð* (a nation of culture, a civilised nation) and *þjóðleg menning* (national culture).⁴⁶ Its outward hallmarks were education, scholarship, science, arts, language and writing, and the type of government, which had been independent. The last two of these were the most important, and understandably so. Firstly, Iceland's mediaeval written legacy was visible proof of the idea of *menning*, and to him the fact that the Icelandic culture

⁴⁰ E.g. *Íþ* 13: 'Samtíða þeim Ólafi Dyflinnarkonungi og Aedh Finnliath var Cearbhall konungur í Ossory. Hann er í íslenzkum fornritum nefndur Kjarvalr og er það víða getið í sambandi við íslenzkar ættir.'

⁴¹ *Íþ* 40-49.

⁴² *Íþ* 22: 'En þeir sóttu um leið það sem meira var í varið, og það var menning og mentaþrá og andleg áhrif í ýmsar áttir.'

⁴³ *Íþ* 43-44: 'Þeir hófu fyrstir manna fornrit Grikkja (...) upp úr gleysku (...). Eftir það skipti svo um, að hver mentakynslóðin á fætur annari hefur nú öld eftir öld ausið þaðan sína beztu undirstöðufræðslu.'

⁴⁴ *Íþ* 63: 'Alþingi var aðalsgróðrarstöð íslenzkrar þjóðmenningar, sú þungamiðja, sem alt þjóðlífið snerist um.'

⁴⁵ *Íþ* 53: '...gullöld íslenzkra bókmenta fellur einmitt nækvæmlega saman við Sturlungaöldina, - þá lang mesta óeyrða- og byltingaöld í allri sögu landsins'; *Íþ* 79: 'Söguöldin er gullöld Íslendinga.'

⁴⁶ *Íþ* 82: 'þjóðlegri menningu (...) á landsins eigin tungu; *Íþ* 103: 'þessa fornu frjálsbornu menningarþjóð'; *Íþ* 255: 'íslenzka þjóðmenningu.'

consisted of two branches was the explanation why its literary legacy was much more extensive and of greater consequence than, for instance, Norway's.⁴⁷ And secondly, mentioning Iceland's independent mediaeval government as a result of *menning* was a cross-reference to its also being the result of his other main theme, the love of freedom. From the outward traits his audience could choose whichever ones in their mind determined the idea of Icelandic *menning*, but the two overarching traits, *menning* and love of freedom, served Aðils' agenda beyond Iceland to claim the superiority of the Icelandic nation both culturally and politically (in that order). This made culture in general, and at some point home rule in particular, something that had to be and could be reclaimed – unlike that of the Greeks!

So how was it to be reclaimed? How was Iceland to become the civilised nation again that it had once been? The second and third periods in Aðils' timeline, that he called the eras of decline and humiliation respectively, ran from the mid-13th until the mid-18th century, when the cultural movement of the Enlightenment in Aðils' words had put priority to the dissemination of culture in all of its aspects – housekeeping, arts, crafts as well as education and learning – among all layers of society, everywhere in the North, including remote Iceland.⁴⁸ Aðils followed up on this by describing the cultural movement on Iceland in the 19th century, the people who had characterised it and their literary achievements, taking turns with the uprising of nationalism and the battle for home rule. The Icelanders were on the right track: they had regained awareness of the fact that a nation thrives best in matters of the mind – its own literature – and in this respect had also regained a position that put them on a level with other civilised nations.⁴⁹ Coming from a glorious past everything was pointing at the future, and what signified the former was to be the key to the latter: Aðils wrote that the past was bound to be the origin and foundation for any true, fruitful culture of the future.⁵⁰ Grundtvig's own praise of the Icelandic society with its culture in the Middle Ages could not have come in better: it gave Aðils the ammunition to state that unlike other nations, Iceland could build its future on top of a culture of its own. Iceland's culture was a thousand years old, as visible in the legacy of the Eddic poetry and the saga's that other nations – implicitly including ruling authority Denmark, led by Grundtvig – had been happy to borrow, for lack of sources of their own.⁵¹ It was a

⁴⁷ Íþ 53: '...bókmentalíf Íslendinga varð svo fjölskrúðugt og tilkomumikið, en bókmentalíf Norðmanna aftur á móti svo fátæklegt.'

⁴⁸ Íþ 209-210.

⁴⁹ Íþ 243: 'Hún framleiðir nýjar bókmentir, sem í sumum greinum (...) jafnast fullkomlega á við bókmentir annara landa og skipa Íslendingum sæti í röð menningarþjóðanna.'

⁵⁰ Íþ 237: 'Fortíðarreynzlan er óhjákvæmilegur grundvöllur framtíðarlífsins. Af þessari ástæðu hlýtur sagan ætíð að vera verða grundvöllur og undirstaða allrar sannrar og ávaxtaríkrar menningar.'

⁵¹ Íþ 242: 'Hún sér að hún þarf ekki að byggja framtíð sína í lausi lofti, hún getur byggt hana á þúsund ára gamalli menningu'; Íþ 239: 'Þennan arf hefur þjóðinni tekist að varðveita (...) þrátt fyrir ítrekar tilraunir annara þjóða að helga sér hann...'

safe statement to make, because no one could deny its truth. All the Icelanders had to do to continue developing in this direction and to further the cause of the nation was to stay away from foreign sources for the improvement of the mind and to focus on their own language and their own literary legacy instead, the value of which – both cultural and general –, he added, other nations had already discovered and claimed to build their own future on.⁵² The nation-wide approach to reclaim Iceland's national culture, through popular education as prescribed by Grundtvig, had to be three-fold, Aðils wrote: by studying the country's history, by reading and honouring the old Icelandic writings and the values they represented, and by honouring its language and keeping it pure.⁵³ Then, and only then, would there be a culture of the future, a *framtíðarmenning*, and a nation to go with it, that one day might hold the same position in the world again that it had once had – it was all in their own hands.⁵⁴

STEP TWO: LOVE OF FREEDOM

Having thus shaped and deployed culture as an identity-defining concept stemming from *þjóðarandi*, it was time to unfold and develop its other constituent: love of freedom and independence – political independence. This line of thinking was not new to Iceland: it had been introduced by the Icelandic bishop Finnur Jónsson in the 1770s in his *Historia Ecclesiastica Islandiæ*. In the footsteps of Montesquieu and Mallet, who had pointed out that freedom was born in the North, Finnur Jónsson had been the first historian to introduce love of freedom as a typical Icelandic trait and to link it to a past that was better than the present, thus removing himself from his predecessor Arngrímur Jónsson's constitutional-humanist image of Iceland by choosing a more cultural approach.⁵⁵ In turn, Aðils

⁵² *Íþ* 254-255; there: 'En hafi nú öðrum þjóðum tekist að finna þetta lífsgildi í fornbókmentum vorum og talið heppilegt að byggja sína framtíð á þeim.'

⁵³ *Íþ* 252: 'Íslendingar verða að byggja sitt framtíðarlíf, sína framtíðarmenningu á þjóðlegum grundvelli, - á sögu, bókmentum og tungu sjálfrar þjóðarinnar.'

⁵⁴ *Íþ* 256: 'Hver veit nema þeir eigi eftir enn þá einu sinni að láta til sín taka í menningarsögu veraldarinnar? Það sem þjóðin áður var, það getur hún að vonum aftur orðið.' As far as Aðils was concerned, they did not yet meet the requirements though; *Íþ* 251.

⁵⁵ Jakob Benediktsson (ed.), *Arngrimi Jonæ Opera Latine Conscripta* vol. 2 (*Bibliotheca Arnarnagana* 10), Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1951, 55: 'Hunc igitur Reip. certis legibus conformatae statum bipartito secabimus, nempe in Aristocratiam et Regnum sive Regiam potestatem'; *ibid.* 164-165: 'Etenim sub ipsum mutandae Reipub. tempus laudabilis illa Islandiæ Aristocratia in pessimam Oligarchiam transformari cepit ... Nec enim alia visa est incolis pacandae Reipub. expeditior, nec magis tuta ratio, quam si tam Magnates quam plebs unius Regis imperio coercerentur'; see also Chapter 2.

Finnur Jónsson, *Historia Ecclesiastica Islandiæ* vol. 4, Copenhagen: Gerhardus Giese Salicath, 1778, 140: '...quis Rempubl. Islandicam ad has incitas tandem redactam fuisse mirabitur? Sane quod per quadringentos fere annos tot intestinis seditionibus & externis insidiis vexata, stare & libertatem tueri potuerit, multo magis mirandum est'; *ibid.* 126:

elaborated on Finnur's legacy by linking the trait to a fully-fledged golden age and extending its relevance from the *inhabitants* of Iceland to the Icelandic *nation*. It was a seemingly subtle but important update from Finnur's approach towards a more outspoken political line of thinking, though carefully balanced against culture as its twin characteristic by *þjóðarandi*. He added the notion that the love of freedom and sense of independence were at the roots of the Icelandic nation and its national sentiments, and that these aspects had brought them progress and prosperity in the past, when they had been free.⁵⁶ The flame of independence had never died, and whenever in later times such sentiments arose, Aðils said in his introduction of *Íþ*, the nation was reminded of its former glory; it would then start honouring the highlights of that past – its language and literature – again and get back on the right track towards a future of progress and prosperity, of culture and implicitly of political independence.⁵⁷

The tone was set: Aðils had unfolded the role of freedom and independence for a happy and prosperous nation. The combination of freedom and independence had been a common theme in Icelandic nationalist writings of the 19th century.⁵⁸ The fact that it did not become one of the most important topics of Icelandic historiography until *Íþ* is likely due to Aðils' setting it as a condition for collective happiness. His next step was to connect both concepts explicitly to the historical context of the golden age in order to complete the function of *þjóðarandi*. And so we find Aðils repeating his earlier statement of defining the *gullöld* as the *söguöld*, to go on and claim that the basis upon which the *söguöld* was built was freedom and independence – more than that, the freedom and independence of individuals within a national context, in a state regulated by laws, because their ancestors had realised that this was the way to warrant either.⁵⁹

Where did this come from? The seemingly paradoxical, national-liberalist connection between individual freedom and the greater whole of the nation had

'Talis, ut puto, majorum nostrorum nativus character, ex fastu & libertatis amore promanans (...) usqvedum Christiana imbuerentur religione'; see also Chapter 3.

⁵⁶ *Íþ* 56: 'Frelsið er eitt of dýrustu knossum mannkynsins. Fyrir það hafa þjóðirnar barist öld eftir öld'; *Íþ* 249: 'Aldrei hefur hagur þjóðarinnar staðið með jafn miklum blóma og einmitt á sjálfstjórnartímabílinu, meðan þjóðin réði sínum eigum högum frjálst og frítt án nokkurra afskipta frá öðrum þjóðum. (...) Þessi sögulega reynsla sannar það, að hagur og líf skjör þjóðarinnar standa í beinu hlutfalli við sjálfstæði hennar.'

Factual evidence of the progress and prosperity during the *gullöld*, other than language and literature, is hardly provided.

⁵⁷ *Íþ* 2: '...þegar sú tilfinning raknar við, minnst uppruna vorrar fornar frægðar og knýr þjóðina til að rækja tungu sína og fornþóknir. (...) Þá hættir hún að reika á villigötum og víkur inn á þá braut, sem liggur til framsóknar og farsældar.' See also Halink, *Asgard revisited*, 469.

⁵⁸ Ingi Sigurðsson, *Íslensk sagnfræði frá miðri 19. öld til miðrar 20 aldar* (Ritsafn Sagnfræðistofnunar 15), Reykjavík: Ritsafn Sagnfræðistofnunar, 1986, 92.

⁵⁹ *Íþ* 56: 'Þetta sáu forfeður vorir (...). Þeim þótti nauðsýn til bera að koma á hjá sér fastri lögskipaðri alsherjarstjórn til að halda utan að þjóðfélaginu og setja skorður við sjálffræði einstaklinganna'; *Íþ* 79-80: 'En sá megingrundvöllur, sem söguöldin byggir á, er frelsi og sjálfstæði einstaklingsins innan sameiginlegra þjóðernisbanda.'

been on the rise in Germany since the mid-19th century.⁶⁰ For reasons of language and due to the political situation from which he wrote, however, it is not likely that that was the source of Aðils' reasoning. A more plausible explanation for his line of thinking is that it was based on the Grundtvigian notion of *frihed til fælles bedste*, which meant freedom for the common good. Grundtvig advocated what has been called a Nordic kind of freedom, one that kept balance between one's personal freedom and one's responsibility towards one's fellow countrymen. This freedom was a psychological concept, one that Grundtvig himself proclaimed to be 'as slippery as an eel': it meant freedom of *ånd*, including *folkeånd*, and as such was a prerequisite for culture and *folkeligheden*.⁶¹ What with Grundtvig being a theologian, the fact that to his mind personal freedom was inextricably linked to heeding the rest of society was self-evident. *Frihed til fælles bedste* meant that freedom of the individual stretches as far as the interests of society as a whole allow for; enlightenment of the people – by popular education – was the means to constitute a society where everyone's freedom relates to the common good (Birkelund 2008: 647).⁶² Society-building in this way, through education, would lead to nation-building, because it would help make each individual aware of the community to which they had obligations and of the common good that needed to be pursued.⁶³ As said before, for Grundtvig the historical Icelandic *allsherjarriki* was the perfect example of a civilised society and consequently of a nation built in this way, and in this respect equal to ancient Greece, which in his eyes served as an exemplary society built on this principle of freedom.⁶⁴ He added that Iceland had had a way of living so complete that it revealed the meaning of life, and that one should therefore rather look to the Icelanders and not to the Romans for inspiration as to how they achieved this.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ For the connection between individual freedom and collectivity in the 19th century, see Susan Richter, Angela Siebold, and Urte Weeber, *Was ist Freiheit? Eine historische Perspektive*, Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2016, 134-137.

⁶¹ N.F.S. Grundtvig, *Krönike-riim til levende Skolebrug med Oplysninger*, Copenhagen: Den Wahlske Boghandling, 1842, 255: 'Frihed er et Ord, saa glat som en Aal, saa det nytter aldrig at tænke paa eller tale om den, uden man først veed, hvilke Kræfters Frihed, der menes...'; N.F.S. Grundtvig, *Udvalgte skrifter* vol. 5, Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1907, 384-385: 'Frihed lad være vort Løsen i Nord (...) frihed for Alt hvad der stammer fra Aand.' See also Knud Eyvin Bugge, *Skolen for livet*, Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gads Forlag, 1965, 293.

⁶² Regner Birkelund, *Frihed til fælles bedste. En oppositional stemme fra fortiden. Om Grundtvigs frihedsbegreb*, Århus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag 2008: 647.

⁶³ Ove K. Pedersen, 'Conclusion', in John A. Hall, Ove Korsgaard, and Ove K. Pedersen (eds.), *Building the nation. N.F.S. Grundtvig and Danish national identity*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015, 423-424.

⁶⁴ Birkelund, *Frihed til fælles bedste*, 226-227.

⁶⁵ N.F.S. Grundtvig, *Udvalgte skrifter* vol. 7, Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1908, 145: '...men det viser os dog, at Islænder-Livet, som virkelig i det Tiende, Ellefte og Tolvte Aarhundrede havde disse Grund-Træk, kun var en Overilelse i Middel-Alderen af samma Slags som den Græske i Old-Tiden (...) og det tilraaber os (...) ei at spørge Romerne, men Islænderne om, hvad dertil er hensigtsmæssigt.'

It was an easy bone for Aðils to pick up and run off with. With the Icelandic *gullöld* thus portrayed as the consequence of freedom in the service of the common good, Aðils could put Finnur's notion of freedom as a typical Icelandic trait to use for the good of the nation that he was trying to build. He immediately took it to the next level by opposing Grundtvig's comparison with ancient Greece. Aðils' earlier remark about Alþingi being the cradle of Icelandic society already implied that the type of government had contributed to its success. He now explained that the *gullöld* had known a type of government that kept a perfect balance in binding society as a whole on the one hand, without compromising or limiting freedom and independence of the individual too much on the other hand – hence the name *allsherjarríki*. Alþingi was what placed the individual in direct contact with the nation through its meetings, in a setting that Aðils called educational, and as a consequence he called Alþingi *skóli fyrir lífið*: a school for life, yet another concept borrowed from Grundtvig and projected onto the Icelandic past.⁶⁶ The result was a superior kind of *þjóðlíf*, society, one that even the ancient Greeks had not known: parts of ancient Greece had known a society where the individual stooped down to the whole of society, and in other parts it had been the whole of society that succumbed to the individual's personal independence. It was a comprehensive social-political – and, of course, cultural – set-up with which the Icelandic nation had secured internal prosperity and external strength during the golden age.⁶⁷ It also explained the nation's demise during the Sturlungaöld: once personal sentiments started prevailing over national sentiments, Aðils wrote, the consequences were enough to determine the fate of the entire nation.⁶⁸ With the balance between the individual and the nation now lost, *þjóðarandi* missed out on one of the two components that formed the basis for Iceland's successful *þjóðlíf* and *þjóðerni*, and culture alone was not enough to keep it intact. The entire construction started to falter and the end of the golden age, with its culture and its independence, was inevitable.

Having said that, Aðils successfully claimed and shaped a golden age that also, or even primarily, heralded the future. The prospects were bright: the tools to invoke and maintain the ancient *þjóðarandi*, to recreate *þjóðerni* and to secure Iceland's superior *þjóðlíf* in a new golden age had been layed out. It was time to put the finishing touch to the political side of his argumentation, and so towards the end of *Íþ*, Aðils ended his accolade of the *gullöld*, characterised by *þjóðlíf* and its

⁶⁶ *Íþ* 63: 'Alþingi (...) var enginn slakur skóli fyrir æskuliðinn (...) því hún (i.e. *fræðsla*) setti hvern einstakling í lifandi samband við sína þjóð (...). Alþingi var því í fyrsta skilningi skóli fyrir lífið.' *Skolen for livet* was Grundtvig's term for his take on popular education, through live interaction with the teacher.

⁶⁷ *Íþ* 239: 'Jafnvægisins er nákvæmlega gætt. Með þessu skipulagi trygði þjóðin sér hagsæld inn á við og styrk út á við.'

⁶⁸ *Íþ* 103-104: '...á Sturlungaöldinni eru ástríður einstaklingsins þjóðernistilfinningunni yfirsterkari (...) í afleiðingum sínum nóg til að ráða örlögum heillar þjóðar.'

set-up, by explicitly calling it an age of self-governance (*sjálfstjórnartímabílið*).⁶⁹ He added that strengthening the unity within the country would further its independence, which he called one of the greatest treasures in the world, as proven by past experiences. Never had the nation thrived more than during the age of self-governance, when it had taken care of its own affairs without the interference of other nations, and consequently it had prospered both materially – agriculture and trade never were better – and mentally, with literature as tangible proof.⁷⁰ With the loss of freedom and autonomy, all prosperity had been lost. Based on these arguments, he wrote, it was only natural that they demanded autonomy in their own affairs, which was the main condition for prosperity and growth. The Icelanders were not to slacken in their efforts until this goal was achieved: complete self-governance was the only type of government that suited men who were born free, and only good would come of it. How to achieve this? By staying true to the nation's innermost nature, because without a pure and unadulterated national spirit not even the best kind of government would keep the nation intact. He then played the guilt card by adding that no nation whose spirit is pure would ever put up with misgovernment. Was this a not too subtle jeer in the direction of the Danes? Hardly: it was a stern admonishment towards his fellow countrymen. A nation gets what it deserves and therefore shapes its own future, Aðils wrote: all future prosperity depended on the nation looking after its innermost nature, history set the example, and popular education of that history, language and literature would teach them how to get there.⁷¹

The message was clear: the freedom and independence that characterised Iceland's national spirit also had to be reclaimed, just as culture did. Aðils indeed had succeeded in ranking Iceland among the civilised nations and he had successfully implied that Iceland would be better off independent.⁷² What was originally a psychological concept of freedom had received a political charge. The line from *þjóðarandi* to *þjóðerni* entailed a democratic element with a clear call for organised citizenship – the term *þjóðerni* implied as much, even if the current electorate was restricted.⁷³ Once citizenship was in place and the nation was built, the logical next step would be building the state.⁷⁴ And since the result of citizenship organised in this manner would be a superior nation, the state matching it had to be the best possible as well. They owed that much to

⁶⁹ Íþ 238: 'Fyrsti þátturinn eða tímabílið þjóðarinnar (...) er sjálfstjórnar- eða þroskatímabílið.'

⁷⁰ Íþ 238-239.

⁷¹ Íþ 249-253.

⁷² Guðmundur Hálfðanarson, 'Sagan og sjálfsmynd(ir) íslenskrar þjóðar', *Glíman* 7 (2010), 123.

⁷³ There is a certain interchangeability in meaning of the terms *þjóðerni* and *ríkisborgararéttur* (citizenship); see Guðni Th. Jóhannesson, Gunnar Pétursson and Þorbjörn Björnsson, *Report on Iceland (Country Report: Iceland)*, San Domenico di Fiesole: Badia Fiesolana, 2013, 2. For information on the electorate, see Karlsson, *Iceland's 1100 years*, 261-262.

⁷⁴ Pedersen, 'Conclusion', 424.

themselves, to strive for the highest – after all, they were better than the ancient Greeks, who had not been able to reclaim anything.

STEP THREE: INDEPENDENCE – OR NOT?

The nation now built in theory and a demand for autonomy expressed, it was time to get to work. Or was it? It would seem that reclaiming the Icelandic culture, as one feature of the golden past, would be the easy leg of the road to the future: the basis had been laid in the preceding century with the efforts of Jón Sigurðsson and Sveinbjörn Egilsson to preserve and stimulate appreciation of both the language and mediaeval texts in learned circles.⁷⁵ Where to these men the idea of preserving language and literary legacy had been to make texts available to scholars, half a century onward Aðils brought such matters to the attention of a general audience in an ideological way, as part of his nation-building scheme. By Aðils' time, there was a lively scene on Iceland for publishing both books and magazines in Icelandic to further the cause of language and literature, and since in the wake of Grundtvig's writings Danish scholars and officials subscribed to the idea of a superior historical Icelandic culture and civilisation and of a golden age in the past and future, no objections to writings on the topic were to be expected. Once popular education was in place – Aðils had laid the foundations for that with his lectures – putting the dot on the cultural i should not pose too much of an issue. Publications, education, a cultural nation: it was a recipe tried and tested by Grundtvig c.s. in Denmark, and it would work on Iceland.

Reclaiming culture may have been considered a straightforward action, reclaiming political independence based on a historic love of freedom was a different kettle of fish. Aðils finished his book by expressing the conviction that Iceland could once more occupy a position in the front lines of international culture by looking after its innermost nature, as it had in the past, when they lived, thought and wrote as fits independent people.⁷⁶ But not a word about the fact that perhaps they might need political independence first, and no details on how to achieve this – he ended on the indefinite note that he had a firm belief that a nation that had persevered in its tolerance for centuries also had the strength and spine

⁷⁵ Sveinbjörn translated Icelandic saga's and the Snorra-Edda into Latin, Jón saw to the publication of modern, critical text editions of old Icelandic texts, most notably Snorra-Edda.

⁷⁶ Íþ 256: 'Á þessum grundvelli verða Íslendingar að byggja sína framtíðarmenningu, og geri þeir þap, mun þjóðinni vel borgið. (...) Sú var tíðin einu sinni, þótt nú sé hún löngu liðin, að Íslendingar stóðu í fremstu röð í menningarlegu tilliti. Þeir lifðu, hugsuðu og rituðu eins og sjálfstæðum mönnum sæmir (...). Hver veit nema þeir eigi eftir enn þá einu sinni að láta til sín taka í menningarsögu veraldarinnar?'

to fight and conquer.⁷⁷ It was a cautious ending to a zealous plea. The ideal of independence may have seemed legitimate, with the historical arguments that Aðils had provided, but the political aspect of state-building had been implicit; how it was to be realised therefore could not be specified. That in itself is understandable, but the reason why Aðils held back on this topic is complex, because it would seem that he had the wind in his ideological sails. Where Arngrímur Jónsson in the 1600s had used the ideas of Jean Bodin to construct an image of the historical Icelandic state whose current validity the Danes could not deny, and where Finnur Jónsson in the following century had used ideas of Montesquieu to create a semi-cultural image of Iceland for the same purpose, Jón Aðils actually used ideas handed to him *by a Dane* to effect a cultural-political self-awareness that would take them from the past into the future – a proper identity that would last.⁷⁸ And it was not just any Dane: it was the Dane of all Danes, the great Danish nationalist who had defined Danishness. The Danes could hardly object if they had wanted to, it appeared, and unlike Arngrímur and Finnur Aðils did not have to be afraid of censorship, so why so careful?

The difference is that Arngrímur and Finnur worked in the same political setting of complete dependency, due to which they could not and did not have a political agenda, whereas Aðils, for whom the tide had changed, did. Discussions about constitutional change, which to a lesser or greater extent all had Icelandic autonomy as a goal, had started not long after 1874 and had gained momentum by the turn of the century. Finally, the first milestone was met when an Icelandic minister of Icelandic affairs was appointed, although the Danes decreed the conditions. As part of the struggle for independence, this was a demand that had been on the Icelandic nationalist agenda as early as 1849.⁷⁹ The members of Alþingi agreed almost unanimously; their decision was a landmark in the development of a parliamentary democracy and achieving self-governance in the long run, but it also involved official recognition of Iceland's being part of the Danish realm for the first time.⁸⁰ This happened in 1902, the year when Aðils was giving his lectures and writing *Íþ*. With the political agenda of Alþingi limited in this manner, Aðils was not able to profess explicit ideas about a constitutional change, because this was neither in the cards nor in the interest of the commissioning entity. So paradoxically, his agenda was different from his fellow historiographers in the preceding centuries, but his situation was not.

⁷⁷ *Íþ* 256-257: 'Ég fyrir mitt leyti hef þá föstu og óbifanlegu trú, að sú þjóð, sem hefur haft staðfestu til að þreyja og þola í svo margar aldir án þess að glata sínum eðliseinkennum, hafi einnig í framtíðinni þrek og dug til að stríða og sigra...'

⁷⁸ See note 55; see also Michael Böss, 'Between tradition and modernity: Grundtvig and cultural nationalism', in John A. Hall, Ove Korsgaard, and Ove K. Pedersen (eds.), *Building the nation. N.F.S. Grundtvig and Danish national identity*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015, 81.

⁷⁹ Gísli Brynjúlfsson and Jón Þórðarson (eds.), *Norðurfari 2*, Copenhagen: S.L. Möller, 1849, 6.

⁸⁰ Karlsson, *Iceland's 1100 years*, 271.

As a matter of fact, in those days it was common practice for Icelandic scholars to be ambiguous in their attitude towards the Danes for reasons of finance and diplomacy and/or political agendas, and therefore to exert cautious criticism at the most, which was common in the historiography of its day anyway. It was no different for Aðils: on a diplomatic note he would have realised, with Alþingi, that the restrictions imposed in 1902 were to be respected because they had opened doors for constitutional development, and in view of finances Alþingi was still dependent on the Danish crown, which ultimately was the source of his own income. In other words, it is fair to say that he was working in the service of two paymasters. Also, the Danish kings truly had not been such bad rulers: they had been benefactors and protectors of Icelandic scholars and their work, they had bought into the notion that Iceland was the cradle of Nordic languages and science, the trade monopoly that they had once put into place was a thing of the past (and had never been considered a great problem until the end)⁸¹, and on top of this they had granted Iceland legislative power. All in all, the Danes' attitude towards Iceland was favourable, and that was the result of the hard work by Arngrímur Jónsson and Finnur Jónsson in the preceding centuries. They had put Iceland on the map internationally and got the Danes to accede to their ideas about Iceland, because they contributed to the glory of the Danish realm as well – it was not a matter of the Danes and Icelanders happening to subscribe to the same ideas, as Hálfðanarson sees it.⁸² Considering the Danes to be a common enemy to claim independence from would have been convenient for the cause of an independent nation, but with Denmark's benevolent disposition concerning Iceland it simply was not possible.

Other than constitutional change not being feasible, one last restricting factor that ties in with the financial aspect is that there may not have been a direct need for change. Iceland was poor, which has been considered one plausible reason why in 1918, at the end of WW I, the Danes conceded to granting self-governance.⁸³ Up until then, Danish-Icelandic relations had been clear: everyone knew where they stood in terms of taxes and budget. Building the state in a financially instable setting might pose difficulties that in 1902 Alþingi was not prepared for. As was expressed in a pamphlet, 'freedom and sovereignty are much too expensive for this nation', and the almost unanimous vote to accept Denmark's conditions on getting an Icelandic minister of Icelandic affairs instead of complete self-governance might also bear witness to this.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Gísli Gunnarsson, *Monopoly trade and economic stagnation: studies in the foreign trade of Iceland 1602-1787* (Skrifur utgivna av ekonomisk-historiska föreningen Lund 38), Lund: University of Lund Press, 1983, 176.

⁸² Guðmundur Hálfðanarson, *Íslenska þjóðríkið. Uppruni og endimörk*, Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag og Reykjavíkur Akadémían, 2007 (2001¹), 181.

⁸³ Hálfðanarson, 'Iceland: a peaceful secession', 99.

⁸⁴ *Fréttir* 171 (19-10-1918), 1: '...að frelsi og fullveldi sé allt of dýrt fyrir þjóðina' (this quote is a reproduction from another pamphlet, in an article that was opposing it). See also Karlsson, *Iceland's 1100 years*, 271.

Bearing these circumstances in mind, Aðils needed to be cautious. He gave evidence of his ambiguity in his description of the Danish kings: whilst to some extent criticising the Danes in their dealings with Iceland in earlier centuries, he actually was careful not to criticise their kings. For instance, not long after the Danes took over control in 1389 the situation in Iceland deteriorated; this was due to the physical and mental distance between both countries, not because of any repression by the Danish crown, although Aðils added that some might consider the Danish governance of Iceland up until the last century one of abominable neglect.⁸⁵ Another instance is his description of the Norwegian assumption of control over Iceland in 1262-4, which was settled in the so-called *Gamli sáttmáli*, the Old Covenant. From Jón Sigurðsson Aðils adopted the idea that the events of 1262-4 were settled in an agreement and that the Icelanders had never formally given up their independence.⁸⁶ After having realised their stupidity in giving up their freedom, he wrote, the Icelanders had stipulated various things, the most important one of which was that the king would ensure peace and let them retain their own laws.⁸⁷ Due to the fact that the king had agreed, they had at least maintained this part of their independence, in return for which they were to become the king's subjects and pay taxes. Best of all was that they could call the change in government an agreement and not an assumption of power, and it made neither party look too bad.⁸⁸ And a third example is his discussion of the Danish trade monopoly: to Aðils the monopoly in itself was a misconception, but it was not regarded as such in its day and therefore one should not blame the kings for installing it. The fact that the monopoly had been disadvantageous for Iceland was the fault of the Danish tradesmen, not fault of the kings, since the latter had done

⁸⁵ Íþ 122-123: 'Danakonungur af ásettu ráði beiti neinu kúgunarvaldi við þjóðina. (...) Þessi fjarlægð milli þjóðanna (...) fæddi af sér slíkt hirðu- og afskiftaleysi um hags langs og þjóðar (...), þótt sagt sé, að öll stjórn danakonunga á Íslandi, alt fram á síðustu aldir, sé ein einasta stór vanrækslusynd.'

⁸⁶ Íþ 106 and 108: 'Á þessum forna samnings- og réttargrundvelli hafa frelsis- og sjálfstæðiskröfur íslenzku þjóðarinnar verið byggðar alt fram á þennan dag (...). Með þessum sáttmálsgreinum hafa forfeður vorir þézt tryggja svo víðtæk og óskorin réttindi í sambandinu við Noreg, að sem næst gekk fullu frelsi og sjálfstæði...'; Jón Sigurðsson *et al.*, 'Nefndarálit í stjórnarskipunarmálinu', *Tíðindi frá þjóðfundi Íslendinga árið 1851* (1851), 497: '...allt til þess, er landið gekk undir Noregskonúng 1264 eftir frjálsum sáttmála (...). Ísland var þannig frjálst sambandsland Noregs (...); hélt þá stjórnarskipun sinni sér í lagi, með löggefandi þingi, er líka hafði dómsvaldið á hendi.'

⁸⁷ Íþ 106: 'Að konungur láti oss ná friði og íslenzkum lögum, eftir því sem logbook vor vottar og hann hefur boðið í sínum brégum.'

⁸⁸ In 1908 Aðils would use *Gamli sáttmáli* to try and get his fellow countrymen to accept a proposal towards more self-rule by the king that he called *Nýji sáttmáli*, the New Covenant, with the same tactics: it would constitute a restoration of the Old Covenant, that was abandoned on acceptance of the hereditary monarchy in 1662, and as such an honourable way out; Jón Jónsson Aðils, 'Nýji sáttmáli – gamli sáttmáli: afsal eða ekki?', *Reykjavík* 9-29 (1908), 113-114.

their best to warrant compliance with the rules by the traders.⁸⁹ It was the same ambiguous stand he had taken as early as 1895 and one he would maintain, though slightly toned down, in his dissertation on the trade monopoly of 1919.⁹⁰ As his description of Icelandic history drew closer to his own age, Aðils grew increasingly positive in his depiction of the Danes in general and Danish kings in particular, until he could not but sing the most recent kings' praises. There was nothing else he could do.

And so the fate of Aðils' nation was sealed: a cultural future was fine, a political one had to be described in implicit terms, and publishing ideas about the essence of a different state-structure for the future was off limits for the time being, because the present would not allow for it. I would argue that this is why he skipped discussing the present in his argumentation – it is only mentioned in connection with the past⁹¹ – and focused on the past and the future of those national characteristics that had proven safe to profile, with the visible aid of cultural-political ideas about the nation that would support such a focus rather than more recent and outspokenly political ideas concentrating on the nation in the here and now. Aðils followed Grundtvig until the end; there may have been similarities between Aðils' line of thinking and that of Ernest Renan, as Lerner observed, but that was because Grundtvig had already formulated ideas about the will to live together and to honour communal heritage before Renan did, in his aforementioned poem *Folkeligheden*, in a cultural-nationalist framework.⁹² Aðils used what he knew and could use, and a fully-fledged political national identity à la

⁸⁹ Íþ 161-162: 'Einokunarverzlunin var sprotinn af tíðarandanum (...) þetta var reyndar hagfræðisleg villutrúarjátning (...). Það var því ekki nema eðlilegt (...) enda verður því heldur ekki neitað, að bæði hann (i.e. Kristján IV) og eftirkomendur hans reyndu af fremsta megni að sporna við yfirtroðslum af hálfu kaupmanna með nákvæmum og ströngum lagafyrirmælum.'

⁹⁰ E.g. in both works Aðils describes a famine in 1756 caused by the poor quality and quantity of traded goods, combined with volcanic eruptions and a fish shortage, and still defends the king by stressing the fact that he had donated 2000 tons of flour out of his own pocket to alleviate the situation; Jón Jónsson Aðils, 'Den danske regering og den islandske monopolhandel, nærmest i det 18. århundrede', *Historisk Tidskrift* 6-6 (1895), 574; Jón Jónsson Aðils, *Einokunarverzlun Dana á Islandi 1602-1787*, Reykjavík: Verzlunarráð Íslands, 1919, 206.

⁹¹ Íþ 237: 'Nú tíðin verður að taka höndum saman við fortíðina til að skapa framtíðina.'

⁹² Ernest Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1882, 26: 'Deux choses qui, à vrai dire, n'ont fait qu'une constituent cette âme, ce principe spirituel. L'une est dans le passé, l'autre dans le présent. L'une est la possession en commun d'un riche legs de souvenirs; l'autre est le consentement actuel, le désir de vivre ensemble, la volonté de continuer à faire valoir l'héritage qu'on a reçu indivis.' For Grundtvig, Renan and Aðils, see Marion Lerner, *Landnahme-Mythos, kulturelles Gedächtnis und nationale Identität. Isländische Reisevereine im frühen 20. Jahrhundert*, Berlin: Berliner Wissenschaftsverlag, 2010, 93-94; Uffe Østergård, 'Nation-building and nationalism in the Oldenburg empire', in Stefan Berger and Alexei Miller (eds.), *Nationalizing empires*, Budapest: CEU Press, 500-501; Uffe Østergård, 'Oldenburg monarchy and Grundtvig's nationalism', in John A. Hall, Ove Korsgaard, and Ove K. Pedersen (eds.), *Building the nation. N.F.S. Grundtvig and Danish national identity*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015, 127-128.

Renan was out of the question. Grundtvig's cultural nationalism, that was first and foremost focused on enlightenment of the people through the vernacular as a condition for political modernisation⁹³ – and also because in his position there was no need for constitutional change – was the solution that solved Aðils' problems. It left Iceland with an impaired nationalism, because it left no room for the full display of the political, but it served the situation. More importantly, the basis had been laid: with his projection of accepted contemporary ideas onto a golden Icelandic past, Aðils had not only promoted that past to one of overall greatness, but provided a prospect towards a similarly great future that in the light of the same ideas had to be realistic. These two factors – the fact that Grundtvig wrote in and was focused on the vernacular and that he provided the prospect of feasible political change – offer the most plausible explanation as to why, despite the common themes of language and the free mediaeval Icelandic state, there are no direct signs of the use of Arngrímur Jónsson's and Finnur Jónsson's works in *Íþ*. Grundtvig offered a direct opening to the future that neither Arngrímur nor Finnur provided, in the language of the people that had to provide the basis for that future. The Icelanders were well on their way to achieve their former cultural greatness, and with the inextricable link between culture and politics that he had created, it was only a matter of time before they would achieve their former political greatness as well. The present was almost a minor detail – Iceland's time would come.

THE ROAD TO THE FUTURE

With an organic unity of history, culture, love of freedom, the nation, popular education, the future and independence, under the umbrella of *þjóðarandi* and *þjóðerni*, Aðils had paved the road to the future: he had updated and rooted a historical Icelandic self-awareness within the limits of what was politically feasible. The unbreakable bond between history as the basis for culture and independence on the one hand and the shaping of the nation on the other hand legitimised the set-up of *Íþ*; moreover, it made history an indispensable element in Aðils' profile of the Icelandic nation and of vital importance for its future. With the active promotion of Aðils' ideas through his public lectures, there was a fair chance of the book being successful. Aðils had hedged his bets well. Aided by the general public being used to the aforementioned oral historic practice and its interest in the reading and dissemination of historical sources, as well as the fact that legislation on education in 1907 and again in 1930 advanced the teaching of history, the book did become a success.⁹⁴ It got raving (yet not uncritical) reviews, was raffled in literary magazines, was read throughout the country and was

⁹³ Böss, 'Between tradition and modernity', 88.

⁹⁴ Magnússon and Ólafsson, "Barefoot historians", 194; Sigurðsson, *Íslensk sagnfræði*, 120.

immediately used as a reader and a history textbook in elementary and secondary schools.⁹⁵ Aðils had initiated a mechanism that had a self-sustaining effect: through the use of popular education he had warranted the merger of ideas on history and the self with a historic-cultural practice and a need for popular education that was already in place. For the first time in Icelandic history, the public self-awareness that was constructed by the learned with the aid of foreign ideas met with the popular self-awareness that already existed.

It has been commonly assumed and acknowledged that Aðils' work influenced generations to come. Aðils actively pursued the foundation of popular education as part of the greater scheme.⁹⁶ More importantly, he and his friend and fellow historiographer Jónas Jónsson frá Hríflu each produced history textbooks in 1915, Jónas for elementary schools and Aðils for secondary schools, that were both in use for decades.⁹⁷ Like other contemporaries he wrote the book for a wider audience, for 'anyone who wishes to become acquainted with our history, and enjoy themselves doing so'.⁹⁸ The question is what exactly Aðils' influence was. Although both books were written in the immediate run-up to the constitutional change of 1918, when Iceland became an equal state within the Danish realm, their tone was still as moderate in discussing Danish matters as in *Íþ*, or even more so. For instance, the Icelanders' notion of a supposed eternal struggle for independence or *sjálfstæðisbarátta*, that has been considered one of the main threads in Aðils' historiography, occurs neither in *Íþ* nor in the text books. What does occur, be it only once, is *sjálfstæðisbarátta* simply indicating the struggle for keeping their own laws as stipulated in the Old Covenant, not a struggle for political independence in the sense of self-governance.⁹⁹ In reality, this struggle had taken place in the preceding century and had successfully come to an end in 1874, so it certainly was not eternal – Aðils just provided a historical background for it. Neither Aðils nor Jónsson was in a position to describe a struggle for self-governance explicitly. It seems more likely that this notion is a later interpretation of Grundtvig's idea of the innate Northern struggle for what is right and good –

⁹⁵ Guðmundur Finnbogason, *Skýrsla um fræðslu barna og unglunga. Veturinn 1903-1904*, Reykjavík: Gutenberg, 1905, 36; Valtýr Guðmundsson, *Eimreiðin* 9-3 (1903), 228-231; Sigurðsson, 'Útbreiðsla', 137; *Unga Ísland* 3-8 (1907), 64. For more information on the success of *Íþ*, see Matthíasdóttir, *Hinn sanni Íslendingur*, 56-58.

⁹⁶ Ingi Sigurðsson, 'Áhrif fjölþjóðlegra hugmyndastefna á alþýðu', in Loftur Guttormsson and Ingi Sigurðsson (eds.), *Alþýðumenning á Íslandi 1830-1930. Ritað mál, menntun og félagsshreyfingar*, Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2003, 230.

⁹⁷ Jónas Jónsson frá Hríflu, *Íslandssaga handa börnum*, vol. 1-2, Reykjavík: Félagsprentsmiðjan, 1915-1916; Jón Jónsson Aðils, *Íslandssaga*, Reykjavík: Bókaverzlun Sigf. Eymundssonar, 1915.

⁹⁸ Aðils, *Íslandssaga*, iii; Sigurðsson, *Íslensk sagnfræði*, 104-105.

⁹⁹ *Íþ* 240: 'Hún (i.e. þjóð) berst við að varðveita þau óskert í lengstu lög fyrir ásælni konungvaldsins, og þessi sjálfstæðisbarátta þjóðarinnar heldur við í henna kjarkinum og mótspyrnukraftinum löngu eftir að sjálft framkvæmdaþrekið er liðið undir lok.'

which Aðils himself left up to his readers to fill in – that emerges after Iceland had already become independent.¹⁰⁰

So how did Aðils influence the next generation directly? We need to look for direct signs of his influence closer to the date of publication of his works. Did his golden age with its twinned notions of culture and freedom remain a determining factor in the Icelandic self-image, and in the case of freedom was this even possible at all in view of the moderate tone he had had to use? The answer is yes. The self-sustaining effect of Aðils popular-educational approach was that *Íþ* became canonical, because within a few years other authors were using the pick-and-mix of Grundtvigian concepts – *þjóð*, *menning*, *þjóðmenning*, *mentabjóð*, *þjóðlíf*, *sjálfstæði*, *alþýðumentun* – used by Aðils to describe Icelandic history and further the cause of the nation: it was their guidebook in the right direction.¹⁰¹ Towards the 1920s there was a general awareness of a national culture permanently associated with a mediaeval golden age that featured a pure language and a vernacular literature of its own, and this culture became an accepted part of the Icelandic self-image.¹⁰² The result of it all was a national identity. It is safe to say that this was Aðils' merit, that lasts until the present day. Culture and its components became vital to the image of Iceland, and no history of the country has been written since that can leave out *menning*.¹⁰³ As for the political side of the Icelandic nation, moderate as he may have phrased things, his ideas about freedom of the individual within the nation soon found resonance as well. This was probably helped by the fact that he was appointed the first lector of history at the foundation of the University of Iceland in 1911 and that he became politically active and was a member of Alþingi between 1911 and 1913 for the Home-Rule Party and the Unity Party.

By 1918, accelerated by the events of WW I in Denmark, the call for self-determination on Iceland reached its peak and culminated in regaining sovereignty and home-rule. Self-determination was in vogue, which resulted in a positive attitude of the Danes towards Icelandic autonomy – one that they did not show Greenland or the Faroe Islands, with which they had a different and much more recent connection.¹⁰⁴ Also, because the physical ties with Denmark had been severed due to the war, Iceland had been forced to manage its own affairs, so they

¹⁰⁰ For the notion of a perceived eternal struggle for independence in Aðils' work, see Eiríkur Bergmann, 'Iceland: ever-lasting independence struggle', in Eiríkur Bergmann (ed.), *Nordic nationalism and right-wing populist politics*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, 93-124 and Hálfðanarson, 'Sagan og sjálfsmynd(ir) íslenskrar þjóðar', 128 and onward.

¹⁰¹ E.g. Magnús Helgason, 'Erindi eftir messu í hrepphólum 1. Apríl 1918', *Þjóðólfur* 65-6 (30-04-1918), 21-23; *Ísafold* 45-57 (30-11-1918), 1.

¹⁰² Jón Karl Helgason, *Hetjan og höfundurinn. Brot úr íslenskri menningarsögu*, Reykjavík: Heimskringla, 1998, 40.

¹⁰³ This starts as early as 1915 in Jónas Jónsson's history text book; see Jónsson, *Íslandssaga* vol. 1, 78.

¹⁰⁴ Gunnar Karlsson, 'The emergence of nationalism in Iceland', in Sven Tägil (ed.), *Ethnicity and nation building in the Nordic world*, London: Hurst & Company, 1995, 33.

now were capable of handling a constitutional change.¹⁰⁵ In the wake of this occasion, the concept of *gullöld* itself and its two key features were happily reproduced in the media in ways completely congruent with Aðils' depiction: the constitutional change with the so-called New Covenant was the beginning of a new golden era, with culture, freedom and independence, based on a past characterised in the same manner.¹⁰⁶ Once the new state structure was instituted, the concept of the individual within the nation could finally be used for purely political aims, and it was: at the start of WW II, the later prime minister of Iceland Jóhann Hafstein delivered a speech for the Independence Party in which he used *Íþ*, with Aðils' ideas on freedom and independence during the golden age, to support Iceland's claim to complete political independence – and attract voters:

‘Íslendingum er það eiginlegt að eðlisfari, að vera sjálfsæðir til orðs og æðis. Hið fyrsta landnám Íslendinga ber þess órækastan vott. Sama máli gegnir um *söguöld* Íslendinga. Um það farast Jóni Aðils svo orð í “Íslenzkt þjóðerni”: “*Sá megingrundvöllur, sem söguöldin byggir á, er frelsi og sjálfstæði einstaklingsins innan sameiginlegra þjóðernisbanda. Þangað stefnir allt hennar líf, þaðan stafat öll hennar frægð.*” (...) Íslenzk þjóð verður að geta byggt traust og vonir á hverjum einasta hlekk, hverjum einasta einstakling.’¹⁰⁷

Full independence was granted by Denmark in 1944, which substantiated the future that Aðils had envisioned but could not express. He may not have been the most original thinker, but he had the gift to project existing, foreign ideas onto the Icelandic past in order to claim that past as something unique and then to use it as proof for claiming the Icelandic future – he followed in the footsteps of Grundtvig by steering towards a politics of culture that would last.¹⁰⁸ One of the obituaries upon his decease in 1920 summed it up: he was *Jón sagnfræðingur*, the historian laureate of Iceland and the best historian the Icelandic nation had known for ages.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Walton Glyn Jones, *Denmark*, London: Ernst Benn Limited, 1970, 125; Karlsson, *Iceland's 1100 years*, 283-284.

¹⁰⁶ *Morgunblaðið*, December 1, 1918, 1: ‘Í dag hefst nýr þattur (...) í sögu þjóðarinnar. Hún er viðurkennd fullveðja þjóð. (...) Frelsi þjóðar vorrar (...) er dyrkeypt samt. (...) Það er undir þjóðinni komið, hvort Ísland verður íslenzkt framtíðarland. Íslendingar eiga betri menningargrundvöll en flestar aðrar þjóðir. Það er undir þeim sjálfum komið, hvort þar rís sú bygging, sem fortíðarmenningu er samboðin’; Bjarni Jónsson, ‘Ágrip af ræðu’, *Fréttir* 2-194 (03-12-1918), 1: ‘En með þeim sáttmála, sem nú er gerður, hefst uppgangan úr því hlyðýpi óhamingjunnar (...). Vér vorum um eitt skeið mesta menningarþjóð áfunnar (...). Vér getum orðið aftur öndvegisþjóð, ef vér látum menning vora eigi slitna frá lífsrót sinni, margþúsund ára gömlu menningastarfi hins norræna kynstofns...’

¹⁰⁷ Jóhann Hafstein, ‘Sjálfstæðisstefnan’, in Jóhann Hafstein and Gunnar Thoroddsen (eds.), *Stjórnsmál. Ræður og ritgerðir*, Reykjavík: Heimdallur, 1941, 83.

¹⁰⁸ Flemming Lundgreen-Nielsen, ‘Grundtvig and romanticism’, 222.

¹⁰⁹ *Tíminn* 4-27 (10-07-1920), 106.